

Gwendolyn E Bushcott nee Thomas 1884-1965

Gwendolyn Thomas could truly claim an international background. Her mother, Mary Jane "Jennie" Simmons was born in 1855 in Kingston Ontario Canada of a Canadian mother, Margaret Cunningham, and an Irish father, Thomas Gaynor Fitz Simmons.

Jennie came to the United States in her early twenties, probably after the death of her parents, where she met and in 1880 married 66 year-old Leyshon Thomas, a saloon keeper, in Cleveland.

Leyshon was born in 1814 in Neath, South Wales. He had begun life as a molder in an iron foundry at the peak of the industrial revolution. His father Simon Thomas had been a collier, and the family had deep roots in Neath. Leyshon married Elizabeth Hill, and had 11 children with her between 1835 and 1861.

In addition to his job as a moulder, he was also running the Cupola beer tavern with his wife in Briton Ferry, a suburb of Neath. The business did not go well. There were frequent fights at the tavern, and in 1862 he was sent to prison charged with bankruptcy. No creditors appeared at his hearing, however, and he was soon released.

By 1867 he had decided to start a new life in the United States. He sailed into New York as a steerage passenger from Liverpool aboard the SS City of London on October 21, 1867 with his wife and 6 youngest children, and was processed at Castle Garden. The family soon moved to Syracuse, NY, where they established a saloon.

It seems likely that Elizabeth died in around 1873, and by 1875 the family was scattered around the North Eastern states. One of his sons, Leyshon junior, bought a small plot of land in Cleveland, Ohio and quickly sold it on to his father, who ran a saloon there. Leyshon junior went on to establish the West End Hotel and Restaurant in Norristown PA, and seems to have been very successful. In 1902 he

was President of the Firemen's Association of the State of Pennsylvania.

Leyshon senior and Jennie were married in Cleveland on July 12, 1880, and on October 20, 1884, their only child was born. The baby was not named on the birth certificate, but was later known as Gwendolyn Thomas.

Gwendolyn grew up with her parents in Cleveland. Leyshon lived to the age of 90, and died in 1904, and in 1907 Gwendolyn married the German emigre Albert H Burschkat there. The pair soon changed their family name to the anglicised version, Bushcott. They had two children in Cleveland, but both died in infancy. Gwendolyn started using the middle initial E at about this time.

Jennie Thomas, Gwendolyn's mother, lived to the age of 85. She died in Cleveland in 1940 and is buried in Lake View Cemetery.

Albert and Gwendolyn moved to Los Angeles, where Albert died in 1954. Gwendolyn lived on in Los Angeles until 1965, when she died at the age of 80.

Gwendolyn was half Welsh, a quarter Irish and a quarter Canadian, and was married to a German. Her father was born before the Battle of Trafalgar, when James Monroe, the fourth President, sat in the White House. Her grandfather, Simon Thomas, was born before the Constitution of the United States was adopted.

Leyshon Thomas' eldest daughter Catherine, by his first wife Elizabeth, was Gwendolyn's half sister, although fifty years her senior. She did not emigrate with the family but remained in Neath and was my mother's grandmother. My mother, who died two years ago age 90, remembered Catherine well and had some interesting memories of her.